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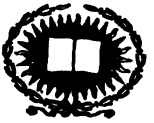
WRAITHS
AND
REALITIES

WRAITHS
AND
REALITIES

BY

CALE YOUNG RICE

AUTHOR OF "TRAILS SUNWARD" "COLLECTED PLAYS AND POEMS," ETC.



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NEW YORK
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WITH ADMIRATION AND AFFECTION

TO

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

WHO HAS EVER FACED LIFE WITH COURAGE
AND ART WITH GENEROUS
APPRECIATION

13 x T. Illus. 15/18.

PREFACE

The voicing of a preference for classicism, realism or romanticism is nearly always the conscious or unconscious preoccupation of critics of poetry. The classicist, wanting perfect beauty, stresses restraint — and is ever accused of praising what is academic or lacking in freedom or truth to life. The realist, stressing truth to life and minimizing restraint as to method or material, finds himself blamed for mistaking the mere raw material of life for ultimate art, and so for praising the sordid or commonplace. The romanticist, holding neither to restraint and mere beauty, nor to unrestraint and actuality, is prodded by both sides. By the classicist for lenience toward unrestraint; and by the realist who wishes the material of poetry to be taken only from the "every day life around us," and who therefore condemns all other material, whether of the past, the foreign pres-

ent, or the future, as remote, extraneous or "exotic."

Yet the romanticist would seem to have the better theoretical viewpoint. For in not opposing beauty to truth, but in holding that "beauty is truth, truth beauty," and that the two are always varyingly blended in any genuine poetry whatever its subject or treatment, he has a creed that is more comprehensive, and that if accepted by the poet will make for larger productivity. He does not insist that the poet must ever keep an eye on what is traditionally poetic, like the classicist, or on what is poetic in the immediate present, like the realist, but would let poetry come freely from any source of genuine wonder, beauty or truth. It is therefore not the romanticist poet, but the realist and classicist as such who drop out of the poetic race oversoon, and who have given to the world the smaller amount of permanent poetry. And it is often only when the realist turns romantic as did Whitman in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "Passage to India," and other poems, that he becomes most indubitably poetic.

These opinions are not expressed here without relation to the present volume and to the present position of American poetic criticism. Realism, and particularly the rhythmless, free-verse realism which has recently been given vogue in such verse magazinelets and anthologies as those of Miss Harriet Monroe and Mr. W. S. Braithwaite, seems to be already near to exhaustion. These critics in exploiting it as true poetry have quickly condemned their pages. And now the question is being asked, Were they sincere? And since they have also discriminated against or omitted certain distinguished poets who were doing free, independent and beautiful work, are they to be critically trusted? If not, to whom can one who loves genuine poetry of any kind go for critical guidance through the jungle of contemporary American poetry?

I sought to answer the last question some years ago in an article to the *North American Review*. There I said that America, still literarily democratic, had no authoritative poetry criticism, but that by far

the most competent and trustworthy it possessed came from the consensus of opinion of the better newspaper reviewers. That answer, I fear, must still stand. For the petty poetry magazines, such as those mentioned, have been far too busy trying to discover new "movements," or in exploiting fads and favorites, to remember large-mindedly what poetry is. And of our other critical periodicals too many, at the other extreme, have been academically addicted to the belief that America is congenitally unpoetic, and that the highest praise any American may hope for is comparison with a frequently inferior, if more widely known, foreign contemporary. To a real criticism, therefore, the last two decades of our poetry are still richly open; though it is to the credit of Miss Amy Lowell that she has recently sought to give an account of the realist side of this period; and it is to be hoped some volume is forthcoming unrestricted in creed, and free of the small spites, suppressions and partizanships with which Miss Monroe, the "endowed," and Mr. Braithwaite, the unendowed, have so successfully impugned each other.

The volume offered here has been written, as have its predecessors, with the belief expressed above that the poet's attitude toward life should always be romantic however much he may lean toward realism or classicism in particular poems: for the truly romantic is ever the imaginative. Narrative poems have been chosen to begin and end it — poems having the region of the Ohio for a background, and one with the River itself as in some sense a protagonist. This arrangement has been made partly for variety's sake, and partly because it gives me opportunity to express the belief that writers of narrative verse are too unfamiliar with the technique of the modern short story. Their disposition to relate and describe a situation disproportionately, rather than to reveal it directly to a climax; and their neglect to hold strictly to a definite point of view; leaves too often such an impression of amateurishness as our better short story writers would not be guilty of. Perhaps no narrative poet can do better than to ask himself if this be true.

CALE YOUNG RICE.

Louisville, January, 1918.

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WRAITHS AND REALITIES

OLD GARTH'S JESS

I

Just where the Ohio bends away
From Coal-mine Hill and doubles back
Between low corn-lands that display
Their tasseled ranks in wide array,
The city lies in a moon-curve,
A crescent smoky at one tip,
But at the other's sunny swerve,
From mill and factory afar,
Green-sheltered homes and churches are.

The river frontage has a strip
Of park-way here, a narrow space
Of grass and trees where one may lip
The cool west breeze and watch suns dip.

Across, the dam lies; elbowed out
Into midstream, to turn its flow
To wharf and warehouse built about
The levee's cobbled slope — where tug
And busy steamer churn and chug.

And here old Garth was master — coarse
In fibre as split hickory;
Shouting command with curse as hoarse
As the tug-hoots, and with a force
That beat into the ears and brain
Of clerk and deckhand, who in fear
Hurried about with doubled strain
To check invoice, or lift the weight
On streaming backs of crowded freight.

Jess was among them — Jess, his son,
A lad of twenty — clear of eye
And clean of limb, just such a one
As made you ask of earth and sun,
Yes, of all baffling Nature, how?

How have you charmed from a dull stock
Of narrow tyranny this brow?
Can you at will say to the womb
Heredity is not man's doom?

Answer is wanting. But despite
A parentage unbeautiful
The lad had grown — keen to delight
In beauty and in love, its light.
Wherefore old Garth, dimly suspecting,
And hating what was not himself,
Or like himself, did no neglecting,
But tore the boy at a young age
Away to toil's hard tutelage.

Away from school — from the new dreams
That books had kindled in his eyes;
Away from friends, and the first gleams
Of freedom with which friendship streams.
"Work — if you're son of mine — not spend,"
To Jess, fifteen, the churl had said.

And there had been a wordless end;
Upon the wharf Jess took his place,
Renouncing all things — save one face.

The face of Ellen Arden — young
With all the Aprils of the world,
And sweet with all the beauty wrung
From flower-bells by the wind swung.
A face that Jess had first beheld
Coming toward him thro new throes
Of manhood that within him swelled:
And that was instantly the goal
Of his imagination's soul.

For they had met immortally.
From the first moment when she saw
Old Garth with hot authority
Burn the boy's cheeks, her heart sprang free:
Free of the difference of wealth
And rooted rank and social sheen —
For what are these to young love's health? —

"Your father's cruel," Ellen had said.
For him it struck his father dead.

For tho upon the wharf next day
To toil with negroes he was put,
To lifting cotton, wheat and hay
And cane cut from the brakes of May;
And tho he heard his father's voice
Swing like a whip across his back,
It had no smallest power to rout
The bliss of knowing that her face
Was in a world where he had place.

Nor for years then was there a change.
He lent his youth, unpaid, to toil,
Nor scarcely thought of it as strange,
Or dreamed that he might farther range.
For Ellen was the Spring's glad green,
And Ellen was the Autumn's gold,
She was all things of joy between.

Till once he saw her with another,
Then a fear took him, with its smother.

What if he lost her? — she must wed:
And could she wed a work-for-nothing?
It raised old Garth up from the dead,
"He owes me more," said Jess, "than bread."
It raised old Garth out of the shroud
That Ellen — who had called him cruel —
Had made the boy's indifference proud
To wrap him in. "He's mean," said Jess,
"But he shan't steal my happiness."

Down to the wharf that night he went
And hung lonely over the water,
Brooding until the eve-star spent
Her fire within the West's wide tent.
No craft was on the current; all
Were tied along the shore for sleep.
Only the ripple's idle fall,
Or the hull-rats, broke thro his sense
Of injury and impotence.

For the old man was strong, he knew,
And a son's rights were as a slave's.
"But I will have them — if she's true —
More wages now — and those past due."
He wandered home, rehearsing words,
Those ageless actors, in his heart,
Tho all his spirit was in curds
Of bitterness before the fight
To win what was his human right.

He rose: old Garth at breakfast looked
Him over with a scurrile eye,
And said, "Curse you, what's got you hooked?
You're late and I've much business booked."
Jess flung no answer: he would wait
And in the wharf office have it out.
"Had I a mother to abate
The loneliness I feel," he said.
His mother at his birth was dead.

He took his hat — looked in the glass:
Would he see Ellen? Chance so fell.

His heart beat with a riot mass
Of struggling raptures. . . . Would she pass,
Would she? . . . before he reached the corner?
He hurried, and she slowed her step,
A kindness that seemed to adorn her
In the boy's eye with deity:
He worshipped — then prayed out his plea:

"Oh, Ellen, I was thinking of you,"
And swift he saw her face turn roses.
"Ellen, may I not dare to love you?
I do, more than the skies above you.
I do, I do, tho you are rich
And beautiful and all that's bright.
And I could climb out of this ditch
Of drudgery and win the world
If you within my heart were furled.

"My father's a mere riverman,
Who gives me bread alone for wages,
But that should never be a ban,

Love a far wider gulf can span.
I have no money, save the store
He's stinted from me these three years,
But he shall pay me now the more —
For I am worth it — or I'll take
What's mine, and wharf-dust from me shake."

She listened — and her heart went white
Then red again with the glad blood.
She loved him, yet it was not quite
The love that conquers all despite.
And then her people — and their wrath;
For they would cast her off, she knew,
Since there were riches in her path:
The *other* he had seen her with
Was one whose wealth transcended myth.

" O Jess, I am afraid," she cried,
" I think I love you, but my life
In pride and wealth and place is dyed,
And with you I should be untried.

If you had money — and no father
To fetter us in the world's eye!
Wait, Jess, a little while, I'd rather."
Then with a flutter she was gone —
But not the dawn with her — the dawn!

For love had spoken. So desire
For wealth and freedom broke out in
The boy — as might a forest fire
That sweeps all down and will not tire.
He hastened to the ringing wharf.
The old man waited at the door.
" By Hell, do you expect to dwarf
My business with delays like this? "
He swore, and struck Jess with a hiss.

Jess quivered, then said, " Come with me
Into the office: you must hear.
I've wormed it to your tyranny
Enough: now something else must be."
" What? " said the old man. " Come? — I will,

And smash your liver into sense.
You'll learn this is no kid-glove mill.
I know well how your lily throat
Is strangled in a petticoat."

They went: the door was closed behind.
Without, the deckhands grinned and waited.
" Ole boss, he shore eats to the rind,"
One said. " Young boss don't know his kind."
Within, the boy, trembling as sons
Will tremble before fathers only,
Strained for the breath of self-control
To say with dignity his soul.

" I've worked three years and you have had
Less words from me than I've had wages.
I've toiled: for what? To see you pad
Your purse — and add to it and add.
And I cared not: the days were good,
Rich with the golden hair of Ellen.
But now I want a livelihood —

Pay for the past — and for the wife
I hope to win a decent life.

" I know the trade: give me but these
And I will double soon your gains.
But give them not — and I will squeeze
What's mine." . . . Old Garth smote on his knees.
" What's yours! " he cried. " Know this, you whelp,
Who lift this whine that I am thieving.
I'll give you what will be more help."
He struck Jess and the boy went down . . .
In long unconsciousness to drown.

II

When he came to it was just noon.
He lay upon the floor and stared.
He heard mill-whistles thro his swoon
Of pain — like drills into him hewn.
" Where am I? " asked he. Then came back
The blow — and still an unseen fist
Like a great hammer, whack on whack,

Seemed beating with a demon din
Upon his wounded brain — far in.

It maddened him; till he arose
And saw the river slipping by.
He watched it as one does who knows
Its beauty no more for him flows.
He was ten million years from it:
The artery of time was severed.
In vain his senses strove to knit
The world that was on yesterday
With this earth-corpse that round him lay.

He bathed his face — and then went out,
Past sweaty, dinner-pailed deckhands,
To strive and call his thoughts from rout,
With his will's bitter broken knout.
He leant against a cotton-bale
And saw the muddy current pass. . . .
And when it bore a body, stale,

Swollen and foul with drowning, by,
No difference came into his eye.

Save that he wished he too were drowned —
Or the old man — yes, the old man.
And what had been so hard — to round
His thoughts up — hate now easy found.
It herded all wild animal
Desires within his bleeding heart;
Hereditary fiercenesses
He did not know were in his blood
Stamped the clear stream of it to mud.

" I'll have my money — and I'll go,"
He said, " I'll get it if I die! "
He left the wharf, stern with the woe
Of one Content no more will know.
He stemmed the heavy cobblestones;
The shanty-boats sent out a whiff
Of fish frying and corn bread pones.
But the sole hunger that he felt
Was — for the stroke that must be dealt.

He took a path thro tall ragweed
That grew along the river edge,
Where as a child he used to lead
In games and many a danger deed.
The sun-cracked clay beneath his feet
Gaped like his broken world within,
On which hot shame still seemed to beat.
Even the face of Ellen now
Was seared from sight within his brow.

Beyond the Waterworks he stopped,
Beside the sycamored Bayou.
A dove in branches leafy-topped
Her low love-note upon him dropped.
Its softness only hardened more
His hate and hard determination.
How could he get what was his due —
And then get Ellen — get her too?

He thought until dark drew the sun
Into its net — the day was caught,

And God the Fisher, having done,
Loosed minnow stars to swim and run.
But Jess, too, Jess had caught his fish —
A way to get his rights. He rose.
"She will not have another wish,
When I have told her I must leave,
Than to come with me, to believe."

The blue arc-lights were sifting out
Their carbon-sparks and settling down
To the night's duty, as a doubt
How to see Ellen brought Jess rout.
He slowed his step from street to street,
Scanning the face of each home-comer,
And hoping one that he might meet
Would be hers. And it was. She came —
Twilit — but in her eyes love's flame.

"Jess!" — "Ellen!" — "Jess!" — "Oh, is it you?"
He felt in his her little hand,

As if around his heart it grew;
Yet his words shook her, like death-dew.
"What is it, Jess?" With low alarm
And love her young girl's voice trembled.
"I have been done a dreadful harm,
And I must go away — or kill.
Go with me, Ellen! say you will."

"Oh Jess, what is it?" — "Do not ask.
To tell you now would strangle me.
And I have still a bitter task
To do, and there's no time to bask.
But you shall hear, upon the train,
All, when forever we are wedded,
For that alone will keep me sane.
Oh Ellen, if you do not come,
Then life has added my last sum."

"I will," she said, "I will, dear Jess,
Forgetting and forsaking all.
At your great misery I but guess:

God let me drain it of distress.
For now I know father and mother
And home and swathing luxury
Can never from this moment smother
My heart from saying with each beat
That you alone can make life sweet."

He seized her to him, then said, " Go:
At twelve be ready: I will come."
Then as an arrow from the bow
Of destiny he sped — to woe.
He reached the levee; saw the moon
Like the thin rind of a new world;
A silvery promise of the boon
Of finding in some new-won place
Relief from his hot harsh disgrace.

But first the money must be netted,
" All that is mine "— he said, and slipped
Down to the wharf that waves wetted
A little, by the sharp wind fretted.

The door gave to his key: the smell
Of dark-stowed freight struck on his sense.
But in the darkness he could tell
His way; and soon the office latch
Clicked — and he scraped sight from a match.

The safe stood in the corner — by
The desk old Garth was wont to use.
The name upon it met his eye
As might a ghost he must defy.
But he remembered the foul blow
Which had been flung against his brow
A few hours since, and saw the flow
Of dry blood on the floor. Dark hate
Rose in him like a flood of fate.

Quickly he lit a candle — knelt . . . .
But what was that? . . . . Nothing . . . . He listened.
The moon fleeced with a silvery pelt
The river's flow — or seemed to melt,

Then came again, so hauntingly
That life was much too beautiful
For money thus to bow his knee . . . .
But ere he knew the tumblers fell:
The combination answered well.

Then his hands found the money — bill
On bill he thrust into his coat;
His wages — yet upon his will
They weighed with fear he could not kill.
A sound once more — he started . . . . Was
It but the scuttle of a rat?
A breathing of God's broken laws?
He knew not as he took one more —
Then saw old Garth stand in the door.

III

He did not rise, till he had led
The safe-lock into place, slowly.
Then something told him he was dead —

He or that other — whose blear head,
With blood-shot raging shaggy eyes
Now held him in a brutal grip:
For death before itself oft flies
In premonition . . . . When he rose
He felt his hand on something close.

It was a leaden paper-weight
Upon the desk.— Old Garth now rasped,
" A thief, by God: and I this late
In knowing it." The words were fate.
" If you say that I'll kill you." Jess
Was strangled, with the lying truth.
" I take what's mine — no more, no less." —
" You'll take the road to jail, you bastard,
And learn how such as you are mastered."

The words went thro the boy. He thought,
" Am I a bastard? " . . . Then, " I'm lost!
He'll see me sentenced! I am caught.
O mother! " . . . . then his senses fought.

The moon died as a moment passed,
The river rippled, a black blot.
Old Garth within the door was massed.
"Stand back," cried Jess, "and let me go."
He saw the shape move toward him slow.

And then he felt within his hand
The weight — how cold it was — like death.
But terror gave him the command:
He seized and flung it as a brand.
For all things suddenly were flame
Before his eyes . . . . Above the heart
Of the old man with awful aim
It struck — and down his victim sank . . . .
A gust of wind the candle drank.

Yet in the horror of the dark
Jess stood there, waiting for a blow,
A curse — death even, cold and stark,
To make of him a sudden mark.
It fell not, but the creeping night

Became an infinite accusal
That pressed upon him — till in fright
He stumbled toward the door — and felt
A lump there at his feet. He knelt.

There was no beat of heart or pulse.
Clairvoyantly Jess saw the face,
As one sees under waters dulse.
Why did it not rage out insults?
"He can't be dead," Jess cried, "he can't!"
But who intentless ever slew
And did not that same anguish pant?
We kill and then would die to see
Breath where breath never more can be.

A moan wrung Jess. He shook and rose,
Sought for the candle, gave it flame.
The room came out of the night's throes —
But as a *witness,* now, that knows.
What should he do? He saw gleaming
Along the floor the deadly weight.

And then . . . . "Heart failure!" came streaming
Into his thought. "I'll leave him so,
And none . . . . no one can ever know."

But first the weight. It must be placed
Back on the desk; and yet he shrank:
It was as if his fingers faced
Lifting the dead man's heart . . . . Yet haste,
Hasten he must. So from the floor
He seized it up. Then with his hand
Crushed out the light, and to the door,
Across the unabusive dead,
Hurried with trembling haunted tread.

The river dreamed, the stars shone,
The cool wind with the night trysted.
But in the world Jess was alone
As all who kill are: God seemed stone.
Or was there any God in Heaven?
The gulfs above him and within
Seemed destitute of kindly Leaven:

Only for misery and doom
Did the wide universe have room.

He would have run, he would have fled,
But knew he must not. He must go
Quietly home and to his bed,
And there lie in the arms of Dread.
But word to Ellen must be sent
That he was ill. For well he knew
That fever with its parching breath
Would dry in him for long the dew
Of health — nor scarcely give him time
To shape concealment of his crime.

IV

The sun rose with a heat that meant
A thirsty day for straining labor.
Yet, ere the hour, and singing went
The deckhands, children of Content.
They waited at the blind wharf-door.
"Ole boss late? No-sir-ree! Ole sun

Hisself's got up too early, shore."
They said, and watched the river foam.
The foreman sought old Garth at home.

He found Jess — in delirium,
The servant and a doctor near.
" Old Garth? " He was not in his room,
The bed untouched: that was the sum.
Back to the wharf the foreman hurried,
Scattered the idlers, tried the door.
It gave . . . past him the cat scurried,
Mewing with fear. . . . The wharfman lay
As tranquil as all dead men may.

The inquest came; — the long slow tread
Of hearse and carriage to the place
Where dead men do not rail, being dead;
Where for the worst a prayer is read.
" His violence was apoplectic
And the heart failed," the verdict ran.
Jess, fevered, incoherent, hectic,

Picked flowers in delirium
For Ellen — adding sum to sum.

And Ellen, thro forbiddance breaking,
Trampling entreaty and command,
Into her hands her young life taking,
Sat by him in his sleep or waking.
"Yes, Jess," she said to the poor brain
That blindly, blindly added blossoms,—
Each to her heart a joy, a pain,—
"Yes, dear, but sleep a little now —
For it is Ellen wipes your brow."

Oh, would he live? For weeks the wing
Of death hung shadowy at his heart,
Ready with silent winnowing
To beat — and leave there but a thing.
But Ellen held it back with hope
And tender courage and desire:
Not while one feeble ray could grope
Thro the dark pinion would she yield:
So nurse and doctor, too, were steeled.

Then one day, when an Autumn leaf,
The first, fell drifting to the street,
And Ellen like a shade of grief
Stood at the window, came relief.
Jess woke. The window glimmered there,
Ellen within it like a dream
That soon would vanish — leaving air
Tortured again, he knew, with all
The fever-things that creep and crawl.

And so he did not dare to speak,
But waited, while the sunset flared
And lit her with a golden streak
Of glory — then he murmured, weak,
"Ellen!" . . . She turned and saw his eyes
Clear of the turbid wandering.
Then thro her tears and tearful cries
Of swift thanksgiving, on her knees
Beside him poured her ecstasies.

"You have come back! you have come back!
Oh Jess, I thought you never would!"

Then she remembered his long lack
Of rest — and calmed her blissful rack.
He was content to gaze at her
And wonder if he were not dead
And she a radiant minister.
He slept the night thro and at dawn
Awoke — and still she was not gone.

" But what has happened? " was his thought
Always, in the blest hours that followed.
He had been ill, he knew, distraught:
But that forgetfulness had caught
Away, to some dark oubliette
Of memory, his piteous crime,
He did not know: nor question yet
Wherefore his father did not come:
About his father all was numb.

But he must ask. And so one day:
" Where is my father? " And his eyes
Wandered to Ellen's — where they lay

In a deep trust, as but love's may.
Ready was she with answer, "Jess,
We may be married now — there's none
Who will forbid it, no, not one.
Your father, dear,— your father's dead,
And mine of shame *must* let us wed."

His father dead? Why did the thought
Seem to him like a thing exhumed
From his own brain — not gently caught
From Ellen's lips with low love fraught?
And why could he not tear away
The shroud of strange forgetfulness
That darkly round the hours lay
Ere he was ill? — "I'm glad," he said,
"I'm glad, Ellen, that we may wed."

She laughed at his weak joylessness.
"But hear," she cried, "how rapturous
My lover is! I must be less
Securely his — or sip distress!

He'll wed me out of gratitude
To pay my nursing of him next! "
But when she saw a tragic brood
Of troubles haunting still his eye,
She said, " Nay, sleep, dear " — and sat by.

His strength grew — and one day he rose.
Then came the wedding, quietly.
But still within him there were foes
He hid from Ellen . . . shadowy woes.
" Do not! do not! " they seemed to moan.
Tho why they should forbid his bliss
He could not tell. Yet thrice alone
He seemed when Ellen was his wife —
And there before him lay all life.

About the honeymoon they hung,
Those shadowy woes; and anxiously
Ellen had watched him — sometimes stung
With fear lest love was from him wrung.
" All will be well," he said, " let us

Go home, and work will make me whole."
Then he would kiss her tremulous,
And think, " What is it calling me?
Will nothing ease this mystery? "

They went — and their first night was glad
With hope — for she was in his house:
His now, with all old Garth had had:
His . . . yet a thought came to him, mad.
He longed to flee it secretly,
To let all go — rise from her side
And run as from some destiny.
But could he from a horror run
That had no name, no shape — was none?

He rose — and tried to sing. With work
Untroubled veins would come again.
" Goodbye, dear." In the words no lurk
Of presage pierced him with its dirk.
Soon was the wharf in sight; the river
Rippled around it silvery.

Was it the cold wind made him shiver?
He forced his feet; and soon the greeting
Of many rugged hands was meeting.

Then with the foreman's orders given,
He turned to mount toward the office
Whither he had been driven, driven,
By the thing hid in him, unshriven.
Passing the window he beheld
A child upon the deck below.
A wish to speak to it upwelled.
But he went on — on, thro the door,
Across the bloodstain on the floor.

Then on the desk he saw the weight.
It stopped his feet — and shuddering
As in a strained hypnotic state
He was drawn backward by his fate.
He gazed as one who in a beryl
Calls up the ghosts of dead events
Despite the prescience of their peril

Compelled — by something in his brain.
Then memory swept thro him plain.

The weight again was in his hand . . .
He saw his father's blood-lit eyes . . .
He flung it, at his fear's demand . . .
The night was lit as by a brand.
Then came the darkness and the stumbling
Toward the dead thing upon the floor.
Anguish then, and the fever's rumbling,
Telling him ever thro its blur
He was his father's murderer.

"O God," he moaned, "what shall I do!"
And gazed unseeing on the river —
Which was not with him yet quite thro —
"What have I brought love's beauty to?"
He moaned again, then to his feet
Sprang with his hands locked on his breast,
And, as one who transcends defeat,
Tho he must die, said tearful, "Yes . . .
I must confess. I — will confess."

He started to the door, aware,
Or half aware, of stir below.
He staggered blindly down the stair.
Who called his name — what happened there?
The deckhands huddled on the edge
Of the chill wharf were in commotion.
"He's sunk . . . run! . . . ketch him! . . . git
the dredge!"
They cried — and in the water Jess
Saw a child's face in drowning stress.

Jess knew no more than that he slipped,
As down into the icy flood
He plunged, and that his limbs were gripped
By cramps that from him all strength stripped.
The child beside him sank, then he
Sank too, once, twice — how cold, how cold
Was the brown water's mastery.
He thought of Ellen — saw her face,
And then was nowhere, in no place.

V

They drew him — and the child — found near
Together — out upon the shore.
Ellen, whose heart would be his bier
Forever, came without a tear.
He for another died? Then grief
Unworthy of him should not rend
Cries from her — but sublime belief
In the great glory of her God
She wrung from each slow-falling clod.

. . . . . .

So, the years pass. And crescentwise
The city grows; while sire and son
Still by the river's fall and rise
Fight the old fight that never dies.
For between young and old the hill
Of life rises and neither sees
More than the way, unmastered still,
That must be gone. . . . . And so the woes
Of wanton time still round them close.

CHANSON OF THE BELLS OF OSENÈY

(*13th Century*)

The bells of Osenèy
(Hautclère, Doucement, Austyn)
Chant sweetly every day,
And sadly, for our sin.
The bells of Osenèy
(John, Gabriel, Marie)
Chant lowly,
Chant slowly,
Chant wistfully and holy
Of Christ, our Paladin.

Hautclère chants to the East
(His tongue is silvery high),
And Austyn like a priest

Sends west a weighty cry.
But Doucement set between
(Like an appeasive nun)
Chants cheerly,
Chants clearly,
As if Christ heard her nearly,
A plea to every sky.

A plea that John takes up
(He is the evangelist)
Till Gabriel's angel cup
Pours sound to sun or mist.
And last of all Marie
(The virgin-voice of God)
Peals purely,
Demurely,
And with a tone so surely
Divine, that all must hear.

The bells of Osenèy
(Doucement, Austyn, Hautclère)

Pour ever day by day
Their peals on the rapt air;
And with their mellow mates
(John, Gabriel, Marie)
Tell slowly,
Tell lowly,
Of Christ the High and Holy,
Who makes the whole world fair.

THE AVENGERS

(*An Interlude*)

[*A road in Belgium, desolate as only night, destruction and the cruelty of men can make it. Three unearthly forms seem gathered together on it — the ghosts of a Belgian child who has starved, of a French woman who was raped, and of a slain German soldier. They are hand in hand and have paused helplessly, as if so recently dead as to be uncertain of their state. Beyond them are impalpably felt the ruins of a church, a windmill, and a house or two. Farther down the road an unreal light seems to shine from some door or window.*

The child is whimpering. The woman peers anxiously. The soldier looks hopelessly on the

ground. All are like shapes in a dream.

THE CHILD. My mother — did my mother starve too?
I want her! . . . Is this Heaven?

THE SOLDIER. No, little one.
I do not think so; for it seems so dark.
And yet I do not know: perhaps it is.

THE WOMAN. It is not. We are lost. Or it may be
There are so many dead the gates that lead
To the other world are thronged and we must wait.
Or it may be that God — if still He cares —
Has yet some earth-aim for us.

THE SOLDIER. It may be . . .
So many things may be. And yet it seems
That the aims of God are too like those of men.
My Emperor avowed it was God's will
That I should leave my wife and little children
To take up arms and kill.

THE WOMAN. Yes, kill and ravish,
Until we kill ourselves — as I have done.

THE SOLDIER. No, no: not that. I had a wife I loved.

THE CHILD [*again whimpering*]. My mother loved me. Is it far to Heaven?

Why did God let me starve?

THE SOLDIER [*shudders*]. Hush, little one.

THE CHILD. But why?

THE WOMAN. For this: to feed the German Emperor.

Who might have starved for glory, had you eaten.

THE SOLDIER. Ah that is terrible. Do not say that.

We are dead now, and truth alone is left.

THE CHILD. I did not want to starve. Why did God let me?

THE SOLDIER. We must go on. Perhaps we shall find out.

That light may lead us to the gate we seek

Out of the world: for surely one is near.

THE WOMAN. I think we are kept here for some avenging.

THE SOLDIER. Must even the dead avenge? God should not ask me
To kill again! I can not!

THE WOMAN. Come: let's on.
[*Leads*].

THE CHILD. I could walk better if I did not hunger.
Will there be bread in Heaven? plenty of bread?
[*A Shape in the gloom before them stays the answer. It is that of a German Sentinel. They halt helplessly.*]

THE SOLDIER [*who shrinks*]. We cannot pass. We have no countersign.

THE WOMAN. The dead need none. See, he is unaware.
To him we are invisible and soundless.
We can be known, I think, only by those
For whom we are kept here. Come.

THE CHILD [*as they pass*]. I am afraid.
Will any take our bread from us in Heaven?

THE SOLDIER. No, little one. Ah! . . . [*stops*

by sentinel]. It is my brother, Gustav. He is with the Emperor — in the Emperor's guard.

THE WOMAN. That light, then, is within the Emperor's quarters.

And now — at last! — I seem to understand.

[*The scene darkens, as she speaks, and then is slowly transformed. It becomes a dim-lit room in which is the Emperor. He sits at a table, but, starting, cries out as the Three appear spectral before him: cries, and his sword falls clanging.*]

[*An officer enters.*]

THE OFFICER. You called me, sire.

THE EMPEROR [*still staring*]. No, no. I did not call.

[*The Three have faded.*]

THE OFFICER [*surprised*]. Then, sire, goodnight again.

THE EMPEROR. Goodnight . . . goodnight.

[*With more terror, however, when the* OFFICER *has retired.*]

Am I distempered, still? I thought I saw them.
Will the Almighty never ease my eyes
With angels or archangels? but send ever
These dead, with their undying misery?
Is He not with me, His divinely chosen,
With me to give my armies victory?
[*Then trembling as the Three again appear.*]
Once more you come? Begone. What do you seek?

[*They gaze at him.*]

THE WOMAN. You raped me, sire.

THE EMPEROR [*hoarsely*]. Not you nor any. Away!

THE WOMAN. You raped me — and raped France.

THE EMPEROR. Lies! it is lies!

[*Half strangles.*]

THE SOLDIER. No, sire; but truth. For I was made to do it:
I and my German comrades.

THE EMPEROR. Traitor! Traitor!
Your Fatherland was ringed by enemies.

[*Tries to rise.*]

THE CHILD [*to the Woman*]. That is the man who took away my bread,
And let me starve.

THE EMPEROR. No; it was War did it!
Take her away!

THE WOMAN. Yes, sire; but there will come
Others and yet others who are dying,
And who are dead, on every hour of the night —
Starved and ravished, murdered and slaughtered others.
For you shall never again look on the living
But there shall be about you, ever escapeless,
The pale, piteous and accusing presence
Of the unnumbered dead. . . .

THE EMPEROR. Help! . . . Help!

[*He has swooned — his head falling forward upon the table.*]

THE WOMAN. Now we can find the gate out of the world.

[*They pass slowly thro the walls again hand in*

hand. The scene darkens and once more becomes the desolate road — with only the wind now sighing along the waste.]

PROCESSIONAL

(April 6, 1917)

Not for a flaunted flag, O God,
  Not for affronted power,
Not for a scurrile hope of gain,
  Not for the pride of an hour,
Not for vengeance, hot in the heart,
  Now do we swing to war!
Not for a weak mistrust lest peace
  Is a shame strong men abhor.
Not for glory — for oh, to kill
  Should be a sacred wrath:
Not for these! but to war on war
  And sweep it from earth's path!

Patient has been our creed, till now,
  Patient, too, our hope,

Patient for long our loathful deed,
For the just in doubt must grope.
But with a foe at last arrayed
Against the whole world's right,
You, O soul of the universe,
Your very self must fight.
You yourself; so but one prayer
Need we to lift — but one,
That by our battle shall all war
Be utterly undone.

REVOLUTION

(*Russia risen: Germany bound*)

The spell is broken!
The evil centuries drop away like sleep!
Freedom has spoken!
And by that token
The gyves of tyranny that trenched so deep,
And ate into the flesh and soul of a nation
Till gangrenous damnation
Seemed running leprous thro it,
Are rent, are rent away, in a swift hour,
With wild power,
By the millions who so long were made to rue it!

The spell is rent!
From the Arctic to the Caspian, in twain!

And from the Prison Plain
Of stark Siberia to the Baltic Main!
And now, O Earth, a free host shall be pressed,
As in the West,
Against Autocracy at last shut lean,
From all wide Europe else, into one land —
Where it shall starve and bleed and starve and die,
Unless along its veins too leaps that cry
For SELF-RULE — which alone God will let stand!

And shall that cry not come?
Shall *Russia* rise,
Russia a serf under her sterile skies,
And on her starven steppes,
Yet not *Kultur*-acclaiming Kaiserdom?
Shall the untutored peasant seize the dream
Of liberty, once more thro the world astream,
While *that* great Race,—
Whose reckonings in many a darkest place
Of the dead Past
Might well have swept its spirit, *first* not *last,*

To the Democratic Day,—
Fails to surge up, at the Future's trumpet-blast?

No, people of the Rhine!
Who have freed Music, brought it from the deeps
Of the heart's prison chambers;
Who have freed Thought — that now no more remembers
Its one time fear to face the Universe;
Who have freed God — opened the Church Door,
That would have held Him shut within a Creed,
Until He now may speak, to any need,
Thro Book or star,
Or the star-shivering sea —
No, no! Rise up in your humanity,
And set yourselves free!
And war no more save for an end to War!

Rise and say to your Foes,
"We want no mastery save of the world's woes!"
Out of the hurricane tides of blood-madness

Lift such a flag
Of arbitrage that all your cruel brag
And frenzied might shall be forgot in praise —
And not endow with sadness
Your sons' sons, and be their bitter drag!
Rise and say, " Join us. All have sinned.
Let us no longer reap the dire whirlwind.
For peace is the price neither of bravery
Nor cowardice — but of the will to see
That the earth is all men's — all.
And so, can *so* be kept
Only when nations from their shrines have swept,
At a world-call,
That loud self-worship, Nationality! "

TO A FIREFLY BY THE SEA

Little torch-bearer, alone with me in the night,
You cannot light the sea, nor I illumine life.
They are too vast for us, they are too deep for us.
We glow with all our strength, but back the shadows sweep:
And after a while will come unshadowed Sleep.

Here on the rocks that take the turning tide;
Here by the wide lone waves and lonelier wastes of sky,
We keep our poet-watch, as patient poets should,
Questioning earth's commingled ill and good to us.
Yet little of them, or naught, have truly understood.

Bright are the stars, and constellated thick.
To you, so quick to flit along your flickering course,

They seem perhaps as glowing mates in other fields.
And all the knowledge I have gathered yields to me
Scarce more of the great mystery their wonder wields.

For the moon we are waiting — and behold
Her ardent gold drifts up, her sail has caught the breeze
That blows all being thro the Universe always.
So now, little light-keeper, you no more need nurse
Your gleam, for lo! she mounts, and sullen clouds disperse.

And I with aching thought may cease to burn,
And humbly turn to rest — knowing no glow of mine
Can ever be so beauteous as have been to me
Your soft beams here beside the sea's elusive din:
For grief too oft has kindled me, and pain, and the world's sin.

A WIFE — TO A HUSBAND DISGRACED

I

I could see you die, dear,
  Since your shame is such;
Die — and let dying clear
  The cloud of it away.
Little was it that you did,
  Yet so overmuch
That all cruel hands now
  At your heart may clutch,
And all tongues of bitterness betray.

II

I could see you die — yes,
  For so proud you were,
You! that no glory less
  Than self-respect can serve

Still to keep your head high
  Above the slime and slur,
The laughter, the contumely,
  That fallen men incur:
And but death can still the broken nerve.

III

For you cannot win back,
  Hope of that is shut;
Falls there are that seem to lack
  The footway up again;
Seem to leave the foiled heart
  With every fibre cut:
Little was the way down
  But soul-deep the rut:
Like infinity its inches pen.

IV

So your petty self-fall
  May be measureless.
Oft we cannot tell at all
  If the end is wreck.

Foes may drive us down a brink
And we but address
Mind and soul to mount again
Out of all distress:
But self-fallen we are at fate's beck.

V

I could see you die, then,
Die — for, as of old,
Love is not a stay to you
Now that honor's gone.
To a wife the stings of shame
Are naught if she be told,
Still, that she is dearer than
All dreams the sky can hold:
Would, oh would you too could so live on!

QUESTIONS

What shall I do when blows blind me?
How fare on when counsels cross?
Where shall I turn when life behind me
Seems but a course run at a loss?
Thro what throes shall I beat to windward,
Uncontent with a lesser port?
Whom shall I trust when Heaven of me,
Heaven itself, seems making sport?

How shall I answer a knave's rating,
Done in a liar's arithmetic?
What shall I say to a fool's prating,
In destructiveness as quick?
How shall I meet a friend's treason,
When it has scuttled the good ship Faith?

Whose are the stars if wide disaster
As its will can do me scath?

Answer there is — a brief order,
" Bear all blows and yet be free;
Let no bitterness set a border
To your will, no treachery.
Speak — if you are the bigger for it,
Keep the silence if you are less,
And if the stars indeed *be* Godless,
Steer still by their godliness."

TRANSMUTATION

It is just a common bell, in a dull and dirty cupola,
But somehow I am off across the seas,
To a little town in Italy, a church in sunny Italy,
Beneath calm silvery olive trees.
And a lake is lapping by, lap-lapping at the fisher boats,
And mountain peaks are lifting snowy mitres to the breeze.
And a mass is being said, and a prayer is in a hundred throats —
Soft, and asway with mysteries.
And I'm one with the murmur of the *aves* and I cross myself
And dip my hand in holy water too;
And I kneel, at every station of the Passion; then toss myself

Down, by the altar, with the True.
It is just a common bell, in a dirty little cupola —
But campaniles rise into the sky,
And a simple God is mine again, a God all divine again,
Till . . . I remember, with a sigh!

WASTE

I flung a wild rose into the sea,
  I know not why.
For swinging there on a rathe rose-tree,
By the scented bay and barberry,
Its petals gave all their sweet to me,
  As I passed by.

And yet I flung it into the tide,
  And went my way.
I climbed the gray rocks, far and wide,
And many a cove of peace I tried,
With none of them all to be satisfied,
  The whole long day.

For I had wasted a beautiful thing,
  Which might have won

Each passing heart to pause and sing,
On the sea-path there, of its blossoming.
And who wastes beauty shall feel want's sting,
As I had done.

THE HEART OF GOD IS MY DEMESNE

The heart of God is my demesne,
I wander there all day,
With the winds of hope,
And the winds of joy,
And the winds of fear at play.
I feel the sunsets of His worlds,
And the dawns, come and go there;
I hear the surging of His seas,
And all desires that flow there.
I sense the rhythm of His years
Like waters ever falling;
Their music sometimes is as tears
Or prayer-voices calling;
I breathe all beauty, and the clouds
Of sorrow that sweep thro it,

Or horrors that in sickening shrouds
Drift, dumb, into it.
The vast pulse of the Universe
Is there forever beating,
Time-that's-past and Time-to-come
Meeting, melting, fleeting.

The heart of God is my demesne,
For what is it but Life?
But a wonder-place
Where a child laughs,
Or a million fall in strife!
But a blest place — or a curst place
I call on death to swallow,
Nor let another from the womb
Of wanton Being follow!
But a place that once wandered in
I cannot cease from wanting,
Or trusting, tho its way has been
Woe-bestrewn or daunting.
A place to bide, with earth and star,

Created yet creating,
At peace sometimes or at wild war,
Fated — yet ever fating.
The heart of God is my demesne,
For what is it but Life?
The heart of me is God's demesne,
I help Him win the strife.

SONGS TO A. H. R.

I

THE HEART'S QUESTION

Is it such a little thing
To find a wind-flower
Twinkling in the wild-wood
Hour after hour,
Dancing to the wind's pipe
With a happy nod?
Is it such a little thing?
I think it is God.

Is it such a little thing
To find the young moon
Flitting thro the tree boughs
In her silver shoon,

Seeking for the wind-flower
  There along the sod?
Is it such a little thing?
  I think it is God.

Is it such a little thing
  To find in your face
Something of the wind-flower
  And young moon's grace?
Something of the wild-wood,
  Ever faery-trod?
Is it such a little thing?
  I think it is God.

II

FIRST AND LAST

Night has uttered a star,
  A first faint word
  Of her epic to follow.
Night has uttered a star;

It hangs in the dusk's high hollow.
Night has uttered a star;
As you, immutably dear to me,
First uttered the word that brought my heart
Starry infinity.

Night has ended her lay,
Her epic lay
Of heavenly burning.
Night has ended her lay,
And the dawn wind is returning.
Night has ended her lay;
But starriest murmurs of your love
Thro all my being's breadth, I know,
Can never cease to move.

KING AMENOPHIS

(A screed for deported Belgians)

King Amenophis built him a tomb,
Down in the desert's sandy womb,
Where he might lie, with a slave or two,
To spare him labors the dead must do,
King Amenophis!

Yes; he built it cunningly deep
And secret, safe from the Nile's sure seep.
But time, sifting, came to rot him,
And the tomb-robbers at last got him,
King Amenophis!

So I am sure you pity him, friends;
For no slave of his myriad bends

Over him now — but whoso lists
Of idlers or archeologists —
King Amenophis!

Surely you pity him! For great kings
Who slay and enslave are sacred things.
And, . . . if any today are left,
Surely they should not be bereft
Like King Amenophis!

RECRUIT 961

I will go over the sea's anesthetic,
To the field of Flanders,
And ask a surgeon bullet to slit my heart
And let this passion out.
For I love two women,
Each beautiful as the other.
And one, if I live, will cruelly ache and suffer
With want of me, even as I of her.
While one, if I die, will think of me as faithful,
True as the earth is to the moon's turning.
I will go over the sea's anesthetic
To Surgeon Death, who serves on the field of Flanders.

THE SONG OF THE STORM-SPIRITS

Come over the tide,
Come over the foam,
Dance on the hurricane, leap its waves,
Dream not of the calm sea-caves
Nor of content in them and home.
For that is the reason the hearts of men
Are ever weary — they would abide
Somewhere out of the spumy stride
Of the world's spindrift — a want denied.
That is the reason: tho they know
That the restive years have no true home,
But only a Whither, a Whence and When —
Then, . . . when the tide has turned again,
Whence and Whither, for hearts to roam.
And who would stay but a little while,
Not dance as we, and sing on the wind,

Against the whole flow of the world has sinned,
And soon is weary and cannot smile.
Dance then, dance, on the fleeting spray!
None can gather eternity
Into his heart and bid it stay,
Swiftly again it slips away.
Dance, and know that the will of Life
Is the wind's will and the will of the tide,
And who finds not a home in its strife
Shall find no home on any side!

THE WRECK-BUOY

(*A wife speaks*)

They praise my courage and put me here
By a ribald wreck and say, " My dear,
  Still guard us from this poor hulk.
He's battered, we know, and gone to the bad,
His chart is lost and the sails he had,
His rudder is gone, his heart is crazed
With the wind — and the tide when the wind's
    raised,
  And horrors thro him skulk."

They praise me, yes, and bid me bide,
Anchored here, on the channel side,
  Where the living ships go by;
Anchored here, by a debauchee,

A derelict of the fair free sea;
Where never a word of the world I hear,
Port news, from afar or near,
But only his maundering in my ear,
With sotted boast or sigh.

And I'm weary of it — of listening
To the loose log of his voyaging
In the days of his desire.
I'm weary of hearing him strangle and cough
And hush when the tide of life draws off:
And I do not care what you may think,
I'm glad when I see him sink and sink,
And gladder I'll be when the sea shall drink
Him down to utter mire.

DELIVERANCE?

(*At the moment of the Russian Revolution*)

"Give up your dead," the cry came, to prison and
mine and quarry,
"Give up your living dead to life again!"
And all Siberia lying under a night numbly starry,
Awoke out of her sleep —
Awoke as at the Spring-thaw —
And quivered, and was delivered of a hundred thou-
sand men!

Out of her wombs of torture, grief, and goaded deg-
radation,
Out of her fields of exile and despair,
They came — those who had dreamed the dreams of
freedom for a nation:

Those who had dared to speak,
Timid or brave or blood-wild,
Of a new birth, a new earth, a Russia risen fair.

The young came — old with the mar and misery of waiting;
The old came, withered and bent and dumb;
Broken of mind, broken of heart — broken of all but hating;
Back to love of the sun,
To hope so long undone,
Or hope of hope in the better days of healing years to come.

The pity of it, the glory! oh the partings and the meetings!
Russia again is reached across their woes!
Kisses are given, with the pangs of long-forgot heart-beatings:
Wherein words fail
To tell the horror's tale —
Or tell it over and over, without peace, to its close.

Never was such a birth — of the dead back to the
living.—
O Freedom, midwife of the world's desire,
Be with all lands that need you, in their hours of
birth-giving:
And lend deliverance,
As great against mischance,
To every noble issue Pity and Progress seek to sire.

THE IMPERIAL CITY

(*Pekin*)

Water, under white bridges, lilied water, under the marble. Still; with the heavens in it. . . . A bird's warble.

Green limbs drifting. . . . . A stork out of the shallows, under the arches, suddenly lifting.

Over the roofs blue-tiled, where I am wending, over she soars. . . . A mandarin by me talks of Emperors.

Steps up to a shrine, under a pine. . . . Strange heaven-beasts guarding it, dogs divine.

I slip a little by one . . . there is a stain. "The blood of China," I think, "The blood of China!" and sicken with pain.

I turn: the beauty is gone: tyranny left. . . . I have been feeding my senses where starved millions were bereft.

But I remember, a new banner now waves. . . . No more is this a changeless land of Emperors and slaves.

THE PRICE

Violets under the may-apple,
Bluets dancing blue,
And nakedly leaping sun-dapple,
All the wood thro,
Feel no blight of the world's blood
A-flow now in France.
And I would the piteous drip of it,
The ache of it and grip of it,
Might, for only a little while,
Leave my heart too!

For, I am weary of thinking,
And knowing thought is vain.
Better is any sinking
Than under the world's pain.
God of the distant star-deeps,

The centuries to come
May shape, out of our sufferings,
A peace that shall no more take wings,
But oh the beauty broken now
To gather that far gain!

THE UNBORN

(*A Phantasy*)

[*The place of the unborn, in a part of the earth from which the Immanent God seems for the moment strangely withdrawn. Its impalpable vastness, through which time scarcely flows, is thronged by the shapes of unborn souls who know that at birth they must lose these shapes and take on humanity. Apparitions they are, yet not altogether so. For the prescience of life, which alone gives them being, is upon them: a prescience now mingled with awe and terror. For swaying and clinging to each other they are looking off into an unfathomable Darkness through which thousands of phantom forms of the newly dead are drifting. And this drift of ghosts at times becomes denser*

as the wounded and shattered and starved from earth's battlefields glide pallid by.

[*The unborn are at last unable to endure the sight in silence. A pale shuddering surges over them and their leaders begin variously to speak.*]

THE FIRST. Myriads!

THE SECOND. Slain and starven!

THE THIRD. Slain and frozen!

And drifting out of life — to which we go!
Drifting, there, on the dark winds of death
Whose void is deeper than the Universe.

[*The throng crouch from the sight, hiding their faces.*]

It should not be. It is too horrible.

THE SECOND. Birth into bitterness — then death and drifting!

This womb, that is before the womb, is better,
Tho here we know but pallor and premonition.
Have we sought life that we should suffer it?
God should not send us to it.

THE SECOND [*to all*]. He should spare us.

[*They lift a great moan.*]

Yes, spare us birth — that leads only to death.
So shall we, who are humanity-to-be,
Shall we, oh souls unborn, not dare to tell Him?

[*They look up, gazing at him and at themselves. Then at length groups grasp his words and arise crying:*]

SOME. Yes, we will tell Him!

OTHERS. He shall pity us!

Humanity should vanish — it is inhuman,
A deathward stream of cruelty and woe.

YET OTHERS [*suddenly aware of His absence, with terror*].

We cannot tell Him. He has forsaken us.
His Immanence is as a wind that was.

[*In dismay and confusion they flutter — then turn to First Leader: for he alone has heard all, undistraught.*]

SOME. Where is He? where?

OTHERS. Tell us! Is it forever?

FIRST LEADER [*not answering till they are calmer*].

He has withdrawn a little while to earth.

SECOND LEADER [*bitterly*]. To drive these drifting millions so to death?

[*The slain surge by.*]

THE FIRST. You speak so, thinking life is pain alone.

Nor see how in these faces swept and swirled
Innumerably there is an ecstasy
As of immortal dreams; a hushless hope,
A beauty of great daring and enduring.
Is there not some transcendence then of life,
Some anodyne that makes its agony
Dearer than our dim void of impotence?

[*They are moved: but another vast gust of the dead undoes them.*]

MANY. No, no, life is despair. From the beginning
The unborn have shrunk from birth, and to the end
They will shrink.

MANY OTHERS. And that Darkness is forever!

The dead but drift the deeper into it.
Let us rebel and ask extinction now!

SECOND LEADER [*wildly*]. Yes, let us rebel! let us rebel!

[*They surge around him.*]

For God's impenetrable aspiration
May destine some to happy planes of beauty
Above the beat of pain, but we are many
Who bear ever the weary mortal weight
Of the world's vain and universal woe.

CRIES [*from all sides*]. Where is He then? where is He?

OTHERS. Where! for . . . Oh! . . .

[*A thought has pierced them.*]

Perhaps He never was!

SECOND LEADER [*wildlier*]. So! It is so!

[*Terror takes them.*]

He never was! There is no God! There is none!
From birthlessness we are swept into birth,
Where Chance alone invests humanity

With duping spirit-tentacles to cling
To life with — Chance alone! There is no God!

[*Fear, Hope and Despair play over them.*]

SOME. What shall we do then? what?

OTHERS [*frantically*]. Let us be free!
Let us, eluding life, leap to the dead,
Forth thro the suicidal universe
Of Darkness!

OTHERS. Free! free! Let us leap free!

[*They run in hosts to the brink of the Dark and leap into it — heedlessly upon each other, in wide disarray. But vainly, for a wave of it wafts them back to their place.*]

THE FIRST LEADER [*when strewn and spent they lie there wailing*].
Ignorant is your deed and unavailing.
Never shall any reach in coward ways
To mastery — or to end — of his existence.
And lo, the prescient moment of our birth
Is trembling out of eternity — is here.

[*The Immanent has filled the place again as he*

speaks — and the invisible winds of birth begin to blow. The unborn are swept to earth, and from there, as they vanish, the weak birth-whimper of a child is wafted back.]

BROTHER BEASTS

Winter is here
And there are no leaves
On the naked trees,
Save stars twinkling
As the wind blows.
Soft to the branches
The little screech-owl
Silently comes,
Silently goes,
With weird tremolos.

I would go out
And gather the stars
The wind shakes down,
Were they not scattered

So far in the West.
I would go ask
The little screech-owl
If he finds ease
There in his nest
After his quest.

I would go learn
If the small gray mouse
Who sets up house
In the frozen meadow
Dreams of the stars.
Or what he thinks
There in the dark,
When flake on flake
Of white snow bars
Him in with its spars.

I would go out
And learn these things
That I may know

What dream or desire
Troubles my brothers
In nest or hole.
For even as I
The owl and the mouse,
Or blinded mole
With unborn soul,
May have some goal.

A WOMAN WRONGED

I am dead and in my grave.
Let me alone.
The seeping of rains down thro me,
And the reaching of roots down after me,
And the skimming of leaves above me, are enough.
Let me alone.

You have had *your* will of me,
So wherefore, now,
Should your questions creep here to me,
And the roots of your doubt reach at me,
And your thoughts restively skim and shudder above
me?
Let me alone.

Would you rifle the grave, too?

Go away.

I have nothing left for your taking.

My hair is not gold, but dust now.

My eyes are not stars, but stillness.

My flesh is not beauty aflame, but very cool.

Let me alone.

TO A SOLITARY SEA-GULL

Lone white gull with sickle wings,
You reap for the heart inscrutable things:
Sorrow of mists and surf of the shore,
Winds that sigh of the nevermore;
Fret of foam and flurry of rain,
Swept far over the troubled tide;
Maths of mystery and grey pain
The sea's voice ever yields, beside.
Lone white gull, you reap for the heart
Life's most sad and inscrutable part.

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INEFFABLE THINGS

The little song-sparrow is gone
And the summer is nearly ended,
The rill of his song was a happy rift
In the surging sound of the sea.
The swallow is lingering on,
And the silvery swift sandpiper,
And I — tho I know my saddened heart
  Has lost an ineffable thing,
  That summer no more can bring.

With the first bay-leaves that flung
Their scent to me by the billows,
I twined some faith, some trust,
As glad as the sparrow's song.
And the terns that darted among
The tides seemed weaving for me

Impalpable wings of peace and hope —
That now have taken flight
Beyond the day and the night.

Ah, Life, you have known my plea
For sun and the tide of fortune,
For winds to waken my sail and bear
Me joyously over the world.
Know too how much of your fog
And storm and rain I will suffer,
If only you do not sweep from me
The dear ineffable things,
To which your fragrance clings.

KATENKA'S LOVER

(*Russia*)

Little Katenka took twelve weeds
And wove them into a wreath for her hair;
Buttercup, rattray and marguerite,
Parsley, clover and nettle were there.
" I want to behold in dreams," she said,
" In magic dreams my destined lover! "
And . . . she did; for a weed *bane-bred*
Brought dreams to little Katenka!

Deep dreams! so now the ikoned priests
Have carried her, at the funeral hour,
Out to her princely lover, Death,
In the ever-blossoming earth, his bower.
And she shall never again desire,

But only lie in his arms dreaming . . .
Little Katenka, in a bride-tire
Of peace — little Katenka!

A MOTHER

(*At night*)

Rain on the maples,
Out of my window,
Beating . . .
Rain in my heart,
From clouds of grief
Within me . . .
Because a new grave,
My baby's grave,
In the darkness,
Seems so little
And the cradle of earth
So heedless!

GIVE OVER, O SEA!

Give over, O sea! You never shall reach Nirvana!
Your tides, like the tidal generations, ever shall rise
and fall,
And your infinite waves find birth, rebirth, and bil-
lowy dissolution.

The years of your existence are unending.
The years of your unresting are forever.
The sun, who is desire, ever begets in you his pas-
sion,
And the moon is ever drawing you, with silvery soft
alluring,
To surge and sway, to wander and fret, to waste
yourself in foam.
So Buddha-calm shall never descend upon you.

And tho it may often seem, for a little while, you
have found the Way,
Your tempest-sins return and quicken to wild rein-
carnations,
And again great life, pulsing and perilous,
Omnipotent life, that ever resurges thro the universe,
Lashes you back to striving, back to yearning, back
to speech,
To utterance on all shores of the world of things
unutterable.

Give over then, you never shall reach Nirvana!
Nor I, who am your acolyte for a moment;
Who swing a censer of fragrant words before your
priestly feet,
That tread these altar-rocks, bedraped with weeds
gently afloat,
And with the fluttering wings of gulls ever mysteri-
ous.
Give over and call your winds again to join you!

O chanter of deep enchantments, of uncharted litanies,
Call them and bid them say with you that life transcends retreat,
And that, in the temple of its Immanence,
There is no peace that does not spring daily from peacelessness,
And no Nirvana save in the lee of storm.

THE NUN

A lone palm leans in the moonlight,
  Over a convent wall.
The sea below is waking and breaking
  With a calm heave and fall.
A young nun sits at a window;
  For Heaven she is too fair;
Yet even the dove of God might nest
  In her bosom beating there.

A lone ship sails from the harbor:
  Whom does it bear away?
Her lover who, sin-hearted, has parted
  And left her but to pray?
She has no lover, nor ever
  Has heard afar love's sigh.

Only the Convent's vesper vow
  Has ever dimmed her eye.

For naught knows she of her beauty,
  More than the palm of its peace:
And none shall cross her portal, to mortal
  Desires to bend her knees.
The ways of the world have flowers,
  And any who will pluck those;
But in His hand, against all harm,
  God still will keep some rose.

A RHAPSODIST'S SONG

All the birds shall sing to me,
When I reach Heaven.
All the leaves shall dance for me,
Seven times seven.
All the rills of bliss shall run,
Cloud-free, from out its sun;
All the flowers of all bowers,
Pour me fragrance, hours and hours;
All the air I breathe shall be
Joy's sweet leaven.

Mystic apples shall I pluck
For my soul's feeding.
On a green palm-bed I'll lie,
Man and God reading.
I will fan me with the wings

Of my own imaginings;
And, to dally down each alley
Of its dream-enverdured valley,
I will follow every breeze
Languorously leading.

When I wish, too, I will scale
Tops of mountain beauty.
I will learn how dawns are made,
How stars do their duty.
I will hold the high moon's sphere
Oft to my attentive ear.
And each comet, trailing from it
Leagues of light, shall be a plummet
For my soul thro deeps of space
Strewn with death's booty.

Yes, I'll do this every day,
In the vales of Heaven.
For my need of it will be
Seven times seven:

Need of birds and mystic rills,
Need of apples for soul-ills;
Need of vision, where elysian
Dews shall star my heart's decision
To delight in love — and in
Life Immortal's leaven.

INSULATION

The telephone lines,
Etched by the lightning's needle
On the night plate of her window,
Seemed but as strands of a dream's phosphorescence
Flashed rippling to her out of the drench of the darkness.

Yet one of them was bearing,
Past her, thro the wet shimmer of the shower,
The sinuous words — her husband's to his mistress —
"Tonight, my passion-flower!"

ISEULT OF IRELAND

(*By Tristram dead, in the halls of Iseult of Brittany*)

I will go up to a high tower
And gaze over the sea,
Letting my thoughts as gulls fly,
Utterly, utterly.

And if the wind beats them back
Against cliff and tower,
Breaking their wings, blinding them,
Hour after hour;

Breaking their wings, blinding them,—
At least one may reach
Across Death, my Tristram,
And tremblingly beseech,

That you will tell me if in truth
  You loved me only thro
The potion that we drank — or for
  My own self too!

For this Iseult of the White Hand
  Is all, all too fair!
I will go up to a high tower
  And ask the winds there.

TO ——

A year ago you died,
And we bore you, palely coffined,
Down to a darkened room.
And you lay there — still as snow
On a forgotten tomb.

Your three-year baby said,
"Who's in that box down stairs?"
Then, innocent of the dead,
While the hot tears choked us,
"I know. It is my mother,
I saw my mother's head!"

We did not let him kiss you,
We did not let him clasp you,

And the hearse came; the clod;
And he laughed — at the flowers.
How far it is to God!

THE HILLS I HAVE NEVER REACHED

The hills I have never reached
  Lie ever before my eyes.
Wherever I am, wherever I go,
  They rest on the rim of the skies.
And they lead my longing forth,
  The unutterable in me,
To seek for all I have ever dreamed
  Beauty or joy could be.

The hills I have never reached
  Lie always in my sight,
Swathed in the tender mystery
  Of unattainable light.
And the hue of them is hope,
  The shape of them, despair;
Their distance ever unwaning — for
  Heart never reaches there.

THE HALF-BREED

Let me go back again,
For want of it comes over me,
  Back to wilds of Pima
  And wastes of Maricopa.
There with desert under me
And desert night to cover me,
  Night, with the cactus stars
  To prick and spur me on,
Let me by my tribe stray,
A far-ranging rover be,
  With no pale-face lodges
  Between me and the dawn.

Let me go back again,
For Yaqui blood awakes in me,
  Let me, free of tethering,
  Of toil and creed and cavil,

Out with the coyote go,
For now his crying aches in me —
  Out across the mesa
  That knows but hunger-law —
Out, with the winds to walk,
Till every bondage breaks in me,
  Till the Red blood in me
  The White begins to thaw.

Let me go back again,
For soul's of little use to me,
  Soul and smoky hoping
  For Hunting-Grounds Immortal.
From their blind sting and strife
They never grant a truce to me,
  Never send a pause-hour
  To string the beads of peace,
Never let the trail end,
With time and tepee loose to me,
  Never let tomorrow
  Unborn and troubling cease.

Let me go back, then,
For cities can but sicken me,
  Soiling and eclipsing
  Sun, moon and all the seasons.
Let me go where silences
And savage loneness quicken me,
  Even as the void waste
  No foot has ever trod.
Let me go where primal thirsts
Thew my heart and thicken me
  'Gainst the throes of thinking,
  'Gainst the goads of God.

THE RIDE

I saw a young spirit wildly astride
Of the new moon ride, ride and ride —
Into the clouds and over the stars,
  Down the West and away!

His hair was streaming, a silver mist,
And meteor reins were around his wrist.
Whence was he going and where no word
  Of earth can ever say!

And yet I know that the swift white fire
Bearing him on was the world's desire:
So after him wildly rapt I rode,
  Almost down to the day!

THE FARING OF FA-HIEN

Thro Gobiland's sea of sand,
Where pilgrim bones are mile-stones,
Where no birds sing, no beasts run,
Where there is only sun and sun,
Went Fa-Hien.

He was faring, a monk of Han,
Out thro the desert, past Khotan;
Thro hot winds and demon sands,
That haunted the way in swirling bands,
He was going to Buddha lands,
Was Fa-Hien.

His camel was chosen at Changgan,
His place was bought in the caravan.
"All is *maya*, a dream of man,"

He said as the desert sea began,
And said it again as the hot sea ran,
Did Fa-Hien.

For the air was thirst, the sun desire,
And his blood became a passion fire.
He saw cool waves and soft-limbed slaves,
As only a man can see who craves.
"From woman nothing truly saves,"
Thought Fa-Hien.

But soon they vanished, one and all,
When he had reached Khotan's sure wall.
For stealing from its mystic calm
He thought he felt Lord Buddha's "Om"
Laid on his spirit like a balm,
Did Fa-Hien.

So on, thro perilous Hindu Kush,
Down to the Indus did he push,
Down rock-steeps, wild and hilly,
To where the Ganges flows stilly,

For he was fain of the Lotos-lily,—
Fa-Hien.

Yes, fain in the place of Buddha's birth
To find the Way of Priceless Worth;
In Kohana to reach Nirvana
And take back thence some secret mana —
For it is here, surely here,
Mused Fa-Hien.

And so, ten years, of monk and sage
He questioned, scanning the sutras' page;
And miracle — and magic too
He wandered thro and pondered thro,
Till spent he said, "No Creed will do,"
Did Fa-Hien.

Then old light thro him sifted back,
And life no more was *maya*-black.
"Nirvana's far from all who preach it;
But the world's near and I can reach it;

Give to me then what's good for men,"
Said Fa-Hien.

So forth he sailed from Ganges' mouth
To that fair emerald in the South,
To far Ceylon, and thence fared on,
Thro desert seas, past night and dawn,—
His camel a ship, by the winds drawn,
Did Fa-Hien.

And back to the tawny Yangszte came,
Where life was teeming ever the same.
And when his junk, with the tide drunk,
Was moored, he said, " I'm still a monk,
But I am a man who trust time's plan,
I Fa-Hien."

A LOVER, DECEIVED

I

One Day

Is it the sea crying, or the gray gulls?
Is it the wind
On the wet beach sands?
Or is it a phantom desire's unrest that pulls
At the heart of me, with lone invisible hands?

The air is wings, all wings. . . . Would the world were!
The sea is a tide
Ebbing away.
But oh how slow the pulses in me stir,
How long the wingless stagnant moments stay!

And now come rain and fog like dirge and cloth
To enshroud all passion —
They and the bell —
The bleak buoy-bell. . . . It does not matter: loath,
All loath am I for what the world calls well.

Oh love that is deceived: that trusted deep
And now is only
A craving cry!
That could not one dear face from falseness keep,
And so finds all life's beauty but a lie.

II

Another

Who has hushed the sea's heart?
Calm it is and still;
With no gulls crying,
And no wind's wine,
With islands like gray dreams
Beyond desire lying.

Who has hushed the sea's heart?
Let Him hush mine!

Who has hushed the sea's heart?
Passion is a surf
That breaks thro my being
And beats in my breast.
From its lone pain-sway
Is there no fleeing?
Who has hushed the sea's heart?
I too would rest!

AT THE DANCE

(*A blind husband speaks*)

There amid the dancers
All may see her glide;
I alone with blind eyes
Stare into the throng.
Thickly comes the music;
Many on its tide
Bear her beauty by me
Charmed hours long.

All the lights are rapture,
Every breath is joy;
That even blind eyes
Can feel with sense averse.
Oh to strike the dance dead,
Suddenly destroy

Rhythm to its last source
In the Universe!

For with rhythm passion
Wakes, in every breast.
It is Nature's love-throb
Luring all the world.
Atoms answer to it,
Dance and never rest.
May not bliss forbidden
Thro her too be swirled?

Shame—shame upon me!
Deeper rhythms sound
In her from my blind eyes
Than to earth belong.
All may look upon her,
Many lead her round;
I alone have brought her
Love's star-circling song.

HER GOD

You think I came out to the wood with you
To take my April fill
Of leaves not love? Then know, my dear,
A futile and vain ant-hill
Of hope was that, dug grain on grain
Out of your heart's quick sod.
And yet . . . tho I have trampled it,
I still shall be your god.
You think I came out to the wood with you
To murmur in the shade?
Only that? Not I, my dear;
So now . . . you're not a maid.
My want has had its veriest will,
Nor fears remorse's rod;
So whether I love, or love you not,
I still shall be your god.

DANSE MACABRE

(Suggested by old pictures)

I heard a great rattle of bones in the night,
And saw the dead rise from the earth — a sight!
They carried them lanterns of will-o'-the-wisps,
And their speech cackled and broke with lisps.

They flung shrouds off and got in a ring,
And knuckle to knuckle I saw them spring.
Their hair blew off, and skull to skull
They gabbled and danced, interminable.

And thigh-bone rattled with bone of thigh,
As tooth and tongue were spat at the sky.
And they chaunted a chilly, gibbering chaunt
Of how the dead have never a want.

" For what want we of the Universe,
We who have six full feet of clay
To be for our cuddling bones a nurse,"
They clacked in a rasping roundelay.

" What want we of the Universe?
We lie in the dust there snug and still;
And the quick may have their better or worse:
We have what 's best — we have our will."

So with cackle, gabble and dance,
With rattle of joints and jig and scream,
Then back to their graves with skitter and glance
They dropt. Zounds! what an idiot dream!

A NORSE SONG

Along the coasts of Nevermore
A lone loon cries,
The gray loon Despair,
With a heart that cannot rest.
His wail is the world's wail
For youth that never dies;
And I have listened to it
Till the tears are in my eyes.

Along the coasts of Nevermore,
Past all return,
Youth's years are gone from me,
As all joys go.
Thro the lone fiords
Of its yesterdays I yearn,
But only find Despair's wild woe.

MOON-FLIGHT

That wingless bird, the moon,
With silvery phantom breast,
Flutters around the earth
And cannot find a nest.
Her mystic plumes are moulted
Each month, and dropt to men,
But ever does nest-yearning bring
Their beauty back again.

THE RESURRECTION ACCORDING TO THOMAS

Jesus Christ woke in the tomb
  Of Joseph of Arimathea,
From death as he thought, for nigh three days
  Had drawn over Judea:
Nigh three days that his soul had counted,
  Somehow, under his trance,
Yet he was troubled, for of the dead
  He brought no circumstance.

Jesus Christ cared for his wounds
  That Nature had set healing,
And walked out under the stars of dawn,
  Like a white spirit stealing.
He slipped from the sight of three women
  Who sought his tomb to moan,

And heard them saying, " Lo, an angel
Has rolled away the stone! "

Jesus Christ went thro the fields
At twilight to Emmaus.
Much changed he was, as he broke bread
With two — whose hearts were chaos
When he had gone and they of a sudden
Knew that it was he.
And he shook as he heard their cry, " O grave,
Where is thy victory! "

Jesus Christ to the twelve appeared,
The twelve, save one, Judas;
Then *fully* died: for his wounds were wrung
With doubt lest he delude us;
For he knew not whether his lone dying
That day, on the cross,
Was death indeed. And all we know
Is grief for him and loss!

ROSE AND LOTUS

Rose, rose, flower of Christ,
And lotus, flower of Buddha,
Make a new beauty for the world
Of your petals intertwined.
Give your color, your desire,
Rose, that the lotus may aspire.
Give your patience and your peace,
Lotus, for the rose's ease.
Of your petals intertwined
Make a new beauty for the world.
Rose and lotus, set your mind
To this gift for mortal kind.

ATAVISM

I leant out over a ledging cliff and looked down into
the sea,
Where weed and kelp and dulse swayed, in green
translucency;
Where the abalone clung to the rock and the star-
fish lay about,
Purpling the sands that slid away under the silver
trout.

And the sea-urchin too was there, and the sea-
anemone.
It was a world of watery shapes and hues and wiz-
ardry.
And I felt old stirrings wake in me, under the tides
of time,

Sea-hauntings I had brought with me out of the
ancient slime.

And now, as I muse, I cannot rid my senses of the
spell
That in a tidal trance all things around me drift
and swell
Under the sea of the Universe, down into which
strange eyes
Keep peering at me, as I peered, with wonder and
surmise.

STRANGENESS

(*In Spring*)

How strange that I should care
  Whether my heart expresses
The witching mysteries that lair
  In the wind's soft caresses.

How strange that I should long
  To leash in speech undying
The wood-wild evanescent throng
  Of odors round me flying.

How strange that I should hear
  A bird-note, then think heaven,
Or earth itself, could be made clear
  With six right words — or seven!

FORECAST

There will be storm: the rough tides moan,
The wild torn kelp is shoreward blown,
The foaming sands with rubble are strown,
The cormorant cries on the rocks alone.

There will be storm: the dark wrack blends
With winds that never have been man's friends,
With missing beats the bell-buoy sends,
With ships that pass to unknown ends.

THE CLOSED GATES

O who has closed the gates of the world —
The sea-gates flowing free,
The mountain-gates and the hill-gates
God made for all that be?
There's never a land about the globe
By *Him* shut from another;
For every Strait and Stream and Pass
Points each man to his brother.

O who has closed the gates of the world —
From coast to farther coast?
From Caucasus to crested Alps
That tower, a snowy host?
There's never a one that has not seen
Blood stream and armies perish

For freedom; so who will not, now,
World-freedom for them cherish?

Yea, who has closed the gates of the world,
The gates that now are mined
And armed and guarded, day and night,
Except to sea and wind?
There's never a least but war has shut
On innocence left dying,
Nor will long years of penitence
Avail to hush that sighing.

Ay, who has closed the gates of the world,
Where food to the poor came thro,
Where every foot that tread in peace
Knits men to men anew?
Dear God, our human blood is one
And thro your heart is flowing;
Purge, purge it then, and open again
The gates to all men's going!

AN AUSTRIAN PRISONER

(On trial in the Trentino)

Reap? we reap but as we sow?
Lies! the seed of the past is in us.
Springing up in a heart will grow
The deeds of a thousand years ago.

Hang me then, if so you will,
For raping her; but first say whether
Some wild Hun on a Roman hill
Was not in my passion still?

Some wild Hun who too was led
Over the Alps, starved and frozen,
Dearthed, like me, till shame was dead —
Me in whom this lust was bred?

Dearthed and driven, until unwary,
Torn from home and torn from pleasure,
He would have seized the Virgin Mary.
Desperate men are not more chary.

Hang me then: but hang the Past!
Let curst War die guilty with me.
For as long as its day shall last
Any man may so break fast.

EASTER SNOW

Snow on the gold
Of my jonquils falling,
In white confusion.
Was Spring, glad
In young green, yesterday,
But a delusion?

Snow on the Easter bells
Wildly ringing
Christ the arisen.
Can their peal
Shake it away?
Is death a prison?

Half the world fears so,
Half, hopes;

All the world wonders.
Ah, sad snow!
All we can *know*
Is that death sunders!

A WOOD-MOMENT

In the green hush of the wood
  A bubble of bird-song broke,
And at the magic word,
  The wind from trance awoke.
A wild-rose leaned to a bluet,
  A blithe brook-ripple spoke;
Then came a leafy laughter
  From willow and ash and oak.

Gaily it ran; then willow
  And ash and oak forgot.
They had but overheard
  Some wood sprite's amorous plot.
The rose went back to her bliss,
  The wind sighed, and was not.

Silence again was the bird's
And the brook's ecstatic lot.

POETS THERE ARE

Poets there are a plenty, who catch at a critic-creed
And ride the rumor of it to fame, while the world
waits in need,
Even even in need of the singer to whom a song is a
star,
Wrought in the nebulous deeps of the heart where the
great song passions are.

Poets there are a plenty, who sell their souls to the
new
And cry it as if a thousand years of beauty were
untrue
Yet brief is the vaunt of a singer, whose newness is
not strong
With the deep sources of the divine in all immortal
song.

IN PRAISE OF ROBERT BROWNING

(*On his Centenary*)

Away with trivial bays,
With wreaths and dithyrambs,
Upon this day of a myriad days
When a great heart came to walk earth's ways
And sing it free of shams.
To sing it free of the pale complaint
Of souls that will not climb;
And free of the petty coward taint
Of the cavillers at Time.
To gaze so clearly far
Into its mystic clod
As to be sure it is a star
Tilled by the touch of God!

OVER THE SANDS

Over the sands the lightning flashes,
  Veining the sea with sudden fire,
Startling the gulls where the tide plashes,
  Driving them from their food-desire.
Over the sands the lightning quivers,
Over the lonely marsh-rivers,
Over the night that faintly shivers
  With its ghostly ire.

Over the sands the moon follows,
  Like a pale boat that seeks to beach
Her bows in pines — that chilled swallows
  After the storm with wet wings reach.
Over the sands the moon shimmers,
Mute mid a host of star-swimmers,

Making her port where the West glimmers
Still, thro the sunset's breach.

EVANESCENCIES

The wings of a dream striking along the heart,
The wind of a star falling impalpably,
The stillness of a night-leaf, the moon's trance,
The lapse of time into eternity,
The mutability, despite our love,
Of the dear memory of those long gone,—
These things can shake the spirit more sometimes
With a great terror of the great Unknown,
Than all earth's long immitigable crimes,
Than all its historied moan.

MY ISLAND

My sea has an island — whose name I do not know.
The gulls fringe it with their wings,
From dawn to sun-setting.
I never cross the tide to it, and never shall — for so
There's left to me a place where disillusion cannot go.

My sea has an island — whose riches are but rocks,
That surf alone silvers,
Or sun and moon shimmer.
Yet when I'm poor in peace — and at my poverty life mocks,
These riches far transcend wealth the World to me unlocks.

THROUGH HUE AND CRY

Two hounds will the whole world follow,
When the rest of the pack are slain,
Keen Hope a-leap from life's hollow,
Strong Love that strikes at its pain.

Two hounds will the world give ear to,
In the Hunt toward Heart's Desire,
Strong Love all courses are clear to,
Keen Hope no peril can tire.

A PARABLE

Last night in a phantasmal trance
I heard the flow of blood in France,
Slow trickling out of severed veins
Down to the roots of thirsting plants.

" Good nurture," said one, " let us drink! "
" No! " cried another's lips a-shrink.
" If God can send it," said a third,
" We should not be too proud, I think:

" For, is the earth in which we bide
Other than blood of men who've died,
Clotted around the framing bone
Of millions long since petrified? "

God answered then, for He had heard
Each hungry and despairing word,
" Of that blood, children, know this too,
Each drop within My heart has stirred."

SENSE-SWEETNESS

Flowers are dancing, waves playing, pines swaying,
gulls are a-swarm;
Sea and heather, sunning together, glad of the
weather, with God are warm.

Flowers are dancing, clouds winging, larks singing,
summer abrew —
Summer the old ecstatic passion of Life to fashion
the world anew.

MOTHER AND SON

He was not wanted — to my womb
  He came against my will,
And fed, there, upon bitterness,
  Unborn and soulless still;
On bitterness, thro nine long moons,
  And on rebellious hate;
So when at length I gave him birth
  I gave as well — fate.

For mother-rapture followed then,
  And pampering thro youth;
The wrong I did him in the womb
  I doubled by a ruth
That made me worship him — and all
  Restrainings prostitute

To his least passion or desire,
His least imperious suit.

So now, to that old bitterness
He adds a bitter care;
And, ruined, doubts whether a God
Has ever heard a prayer;
Doubts, yet can never lay in him
The ghost of pale remorse,
That haunts me too, thro the long years,
With lone and spectral force.

ARIEL TO THE AGING SHAKESPEARE

If, O master, at your heart
Caliban claws of age creep,
Call me to come from the air's blue deep,
Call!
For I know where dew of youth yet lingers
On great dreams you hold in thrall.
Know how to strew your foes with magic,
All!
Know to undo the years turned tragic,
Years that sigh and deathward flow,
While grieved musings thro your spirit
Go!
Call to me then, for swift I'll hear it,
I, your Ariel, set free,
But who still your sprite will be!
Call!

PAGAN

Will the earth-poetry of Greece never die?
Sitting in the green wood, lonely, was I,
When I heard a voice sing, centuries away
From the Vale of Tempe, from the gods' sway:

April is a naiad
Slipping from a pool;
May a leafy dryad
Hiding in the cool;
June is a wood-nymph
Teasing them to play;
Till comes, later,
The hot-hearted satyr,
August, their awaiter,
To frighten them away!

Will the earth-poetry of Greece never die?
Still for its youth must the whole world sigh?

PROVIDENCE

When I was far from the sea's voice and vastness,
I looked for God in the days and hours and seasons.
But now, by its large and eternal tides surrounded,
I know I shall only find Him in the greater swing of the years.

For like the sea's are His mysteries, not to be learned from a single surf-beat,
No wave suffices Him for a revelation.
How like the sea's, that dower all lands with green and the breath of blossoms,
With dews that never have heard its deathless surges.

Let me be patient, then — sure that stars are not
jetsam tossing
On meaningless waters of waste Omnipotence.
Let me be patient, even when man is sunk in the
storm of His purpose,
And swirled, a strangled corpse, under His ages.

WRAITHWOOD HILL

I

When Maisie came to Wraithwood Hill
She looked back from it to the town,
Across green tops of pines far down,
And wondered how her fate would fall.
Straight from the doorway thro the trees,
That sighed as only pines can sigh,
She saw, swathed in the setting light,
The courthouse tower cut the sky,
And a pang quivered in her eye.

She was the bride of Allen Graves,
Master of Wraithwood and its Hill,
That rose behind, at the weird will
Of Nature, into rocky waves.

And crevices between the rocks
Ran dark and deep, under pine glooms,
Up to the peak, where was a place
Of family burial — whose nine tombs,
One yet unfilled, told of life's dooms.

Allen had won her: for about
Him was a lure of mystery.
He had lived solitarily
At Wraithwood — a romantic Doubt,
A Speculation for the tongues
Of the drab little town, when thro
The streets at times he spurred his roan,
As if he had some deed to do
That but an evil spirit knew.

And now, the bodeful wedding done,
She looked back with a pang of fear.
She had left so much that was dear;
Had she for shadows given the sun?
Under that tower, pale, perhaps,

Now, with the loss of her, she saw
The deep eyes of *another*, whom
Love with its unrequiting law
Had left for loneliness to gnaw.

One she had known from childhood days,
Quentin Gillespie, a glad boy,
With whom her girl's heart, in its joy,
Had first learnt Nature's wilding ways.
'Twixt the Toll Gate and Crows' Retreat,
Or by creek windings east and west,
They knew a hundred happy dells —
One happier than all the rest,
Because love there had been confessed.

Happier till — with Quentin grown
To manhood and a hope of fame
In the Law's corridors — there came
Allen across her heart, unknown.
And as a willow wand is drawn
By darkling water under ground,

She to the strange mood of his blood
Was drawn — and now to him was bound:
Tho Quentin's wrong could not be drowned.

It wrung her. . . . But she started, for
Her bridegroom's gaze was on her. "Well?"
He questioned, with a tone whose spell
She almost wished now to abhor.
"Well, is that tower Regret's; and Law
More tempting than a bridal feast
For two who from a stench of flowers
And a mellifluous marriage-priest
Are for a honeymoon released?"

She laughed, but somehow shuddered. This
Was his well wonted way . . . and yet,
Tuned as she was to reach and get
His vibrance, there was some Abyss,
Some more than tempting mystery
In which his words rang resonant.
"Allen," she said, "I'm half afraid;

Tell me what is it that can haunt
Me so in you — for oh, I want —"

She did not finish, for a cloud
Sullen as that blotting the sun
Out of the west seemed darkly spun
Across his mood, a bitter shroud.
So to bring brightness back, she said,
"Come, we will have some wine," not knowing
That of all words flung lightly forth,
None that were meant for April sowing
Could bring a more relentless mowing.

She did not see that as he wheeled
A duel raged upon his lips,
A spasm with his soul at grips,
Or how his eye thirstily reeled.
They feasted, and the wine went singing
Into her heart with rilly joy.
To his, amid her bubbling talk,

It crept with madness to destroy,
As well he knew, their life's alloy.

For while she lifted to her lips
The happy foam that set joy free,
Each silent glass of devilry
He drained lashed him with sullen whips.
She babbled till across the wings
Of her light words a low oath fell.
" By God, you little fool," he said,
" Could you not see what was my spell?
This drink for me is fire of Hell.

" I'm drunk, upon my wedding night,
And I'll be drunker ere the day.
Not even your soft body's sway
Can tempt me now this thirst to slight."
He rose and left her in the glitter
There of the candles and cold glass,
That seemed to burn or freeze the horror
Of what had darkly come to pass
Into her heart's fate-stricken mass.

II

So began life for Maisie Graves —
Or was it death? The morning came;
The moon lost all her silver flame,
The crows flew fieldward, hunger slaves.
The dewy stillness of the pines
Grew on her eyes that had not closed.
The Court House clock across cool space
Rang to her over roofs that dozed.
A tense sob shook her: then she rose.

No sound from Allen thro the night
Had come to her, none came with day.
Locked fiercely in he drank away
His soul and reason — and her right,
Her bridal right, her woman right,
Her love he swallowed thro those hours:
While servants tended silently,
As if compelled by occult powers
To watch death settle on sweet flowers.

Once she threw on her hat to go
Back to her mother — or to him,
Who under that clock tower, dim
Now in the dazzling overflow
Of the full sun would . . . And yet, no.
She could not face her mother's plaint,
A widow's pale and privileged whine;
And Quentin's hungering restraint
Was not that of a selfless saint.

And so she waited, wandered, walked —
At last among the cone-strewn rocks
Of Wraithwood Hill; and by a fox
Up to its peak unknown was stalked.
Sudden she came upon that place
Of burial with its empty tomb
Agape — and in it almost stept:
Then fled back shuddering thro the gloom
Of the pine boles to the sun's room.

And there, staggering out, *he* stood
Before her, on the columned porch,

Allen — his eyes a cunning torch,
And treachery within his mood.
" You did not go to him? " he said.
Then ere her lips moved, " No pale lies.
You're mine, and if Gillespie dares
To take what has been in your eyes
For him today — he's less than wise."

Which said, back to his drunkenness,
Till, soberly, on the third night,
He sought her room: There was no flight;
Her flesh shone thro a thin night-dress.
" I ask no pardon," said he, " none.
I drink, for drink is in my blood.
The heat of those dead men upon
The Hill behind us rules my mood:
They rise in me and want's at flood.

" But you — what will you do? Accept
My love and passion for the whiles
I am myself? By winning wiles

Ghosts from the blood might oft be kept.
And this might be our bridal hour!
I want you — all your beauty calls
To me, in drunkenness or free,
Like trumpets from dream-lifted walls,
Like music that on yearning falls."

She heard in terror — heard and shrank
Back from him, covering her breast
With arms that ruthlessly were pressed
Into its beauty — which he drank.
" Go from me, go: give me again
My freedom! " shuddering she cried.
" What in me once was love is now
A corpse three days have horrified
With crawling moments. Love has died."

" Or never was, perhaps? " he shrugged.
And then, " There's time. I'll go tonight.
But see to it there is no flight,
No fears by your Gillespie drugged.

For half I think he stands between
Us now — or drink breeds jealousy."
When he was gone she could not move,
Till terror took her suddenly,
Lest he return — and worse things be.

She locked the door. Then in the moon
Out of her open window heard
The wild hoofs of his filly, spurred
Reckless into the night's deep swoon.
Asleep at last she fell, to dream
That she was mother to a child
Which was a drunkard at her breast,
And that her sotted husband smiled
And said, " Like me." She woke half wild.

III

Then came her friends to look upon
Her honeymoon and guess its glow.
They found instead a haunted woe,
And silence over pale lips drawn.

Rumor that panders to all ills
Was whispering soon — and Quentin heard.
" A drunkard's bride . . . stricken with fear,"
Was the invariable word
That in the stream of tattle stirred.

So as forlorn, at a day's close,
She stood beside the sullen brook,
Half-circling Wraithwood with its hook
Of rainy waters, Quentin rose.
" Maisie, I had to come," he said.
" You are unhappy! Oh, my God,
Why did you leave me! Will you come
Away with me? " . . . The oozy sod
Under her feet held her fear-shod.

Yet for a moment she reached out
Her arms to him, and " Quentin! " cried.
But as he leapt swift to her side,
Terror became for her too stout.
And so she fled, stumbling and falling,

Rising and stumbling once again.
Aware, she knew not how, that Allen
Had heard, and from that guilty fen,
His heart, would some wild deed unpen.

She knew — and yet, strangling and weeping,
As the hysteric moment hung,
She ran, her heart and knees unstrung,
Across her eyes wet branches sweeping.
She felt a flower crush beneath
Her foot into the sobbing soil.
Then a shot rang, and Quentin's life,
Under her feet, a bloody moil,
She seemed to trample in wild toil.

Fainting she fell at last within
Her chamber — all her terror still;
It was as if Death had his will,
Or as if breath had never been.
The minutes passed then, till a step,
That fell in stealth upon the stair

Without, went thro her frigid frame,
A vibrant prescience in the air
Of him whose crime had laid her there.

She moaned. He entered — blood upon
His hand and cheek that bore no wound;
And horror's desperation runed
His haggard look, drunken and drawn.
" Get up," he cursed her, " there's no time.
Damn you, I must be gone from here.
And you must stay " — her eyes unclosed —
" Stay and do all you can to clear . . ."
She saw the blood and screamed with fear.

" What have you done! what have you done! "
He wiped a finger of its blood;
Then a cold mockery seemed to flood
His drunken sense, and thro it run.
" Oh, you have killed him! " At the words
He straightened. In the pines without
A dark wind went. It seemed like death

To Maisie, like the moaning shout
Of Quentin's soul, gone out, gone out!

She tried to move — toward the door.
Was Quentin killed? oh, was he? oh!
Her soul was swimming in blind woe,
A sea beneath her was the floor.
Then thro her suddenly the stare
Of Allen went, searching her eyes.
A dark hate and a drunken light
Of new suspicion seemed to rise
Thro him, and cunning — coldly wise.

It broke, " You'll go with me, not stay,
And treacherously tell! Get ready! "
Rage made his tongue a moment steady.
Maisie was like a reed asway.
And yet she knew that she must go
There to the brook and see! Her hair
Fell as she fled him, ere he knew,
And found her foot upon the stair,
His following with fuddled care.

He overtook her at the gate.
"Run? you would run away and tell?
I'll put you where you will be well
Away from words — and power to prate."
By her hair-tangled wrist he drew
Her then: the pines were moaning, moaning,
And the new moon hung in the West,
Like a cold blade some hand was honing
Against the clouds, for an atoning.

He forced her feet up the dark path
Toward the Hill's summit — and the tombs.
Horror was in its rocky glooms;
She wept, she pled against his wrath.
The night things all seemed listening
Around her, hostile, frightened, wild.
A startled owl swept past, and with
A hoot their stumbling way reviled:
Thro Allen's teeth one curse more filed.

At last they reached it — that death-place,
Where the wind wilder went — and where

The shadows on the nine stones there
Danced like dark ghosts, then sank apace.
Maisie cried out, trembling and shaking,
For now she knew. In that void tomb
He meant to put her, in that one
Digged for *his* final resting-room. . . .
Her swooning did not stay the doom.

IV

Such nights have been — and that night was.
The hand that whetted the sharp moon
For sacrifice had drawn it soon
Down thro the stars: then came a pause.
An hour: yet Maisie had not moved.
Then a chill pierced her heart and fluttered
Her pulseless lids; a troubled sigh
Thro her insensate lips was uttered,
Such as the pines above her muttered.

Then her eyes opened. Where was she?
Only the darkness and dank stone;

And somewhere still that low pine-moan,
Familiar, yet . . . where could she be?
A drop fell on her from the slab
Over her head — then memory
Let in, on her oblivion,
A drop which set those terrors free
That swept her to insentiency.

Those terrors of the nine death-stones,
Where now she knew she was shut in,
By Allen's wild and drunken sin,
Under the earth beside dead bones,
She sought to rise and struck her brow
Against the slab that covered her.
The pain and horror as she fell
Took from her limbs the strength to stir —
And left wraiths where no true wraiths were.

For thro the tombs around her those
Forebears of Allen seemed to ooze,
And their pale shape to interfuse

With all her body's haunted throes.
Their deathly inebriety
So wrought upon her that a shriek
Broke from her lips, despite all terror,
And then another, till fear-weak,
Life once more from her seemed to leak.

But death, the swiftest of all things,
Can be so lingeringly slow
That time seems cruelty a-flow
Out of eternity's dry springs.
And so for Maisie to and fro
Came trance and terror — came and went,
Till the last beat within her veins
Was frozen, its cold anguish spent,
And in *sure* Silence she was pent.

They found her — after Quentin's death
Had set the quest a-cry. Her hair
Was dewed with the damp dripping there,
Her sweet lips absent of all breath.

Under the pines they bore her down,
Tenderly, by each rocky place
Whence wild flowers leaned with swaying sigh
To look into her passing face
And say above her a still grace.

And now Wraithwood is tenantless,
Save for the fox — and, it is said,
For stealthier footsteps of the dead
That sometimes sadly round it press.
For Murder is a landlord none
Will lease from save the neediest.
So the town clock a verdict still
Strikes thro each unforgetting breast
Of that dark night's forlorn inquest.

THE END

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